

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 04-05-2011		2. REPORT TYPE FINAL		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE  Mirage or Reality: Enabling Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Collective Defense				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)  LCDR Andrew T. Steele, USN  Paper Advisor: CAPT Mike Fitzpatrick, USN				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)  Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the Naval War College faculty in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT The wicked problem of current Iranian activities represents the most significant nation-level threat to security in the Arabian Gulf region and continues to be of mutual interest to the U.S. and the six member-states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The primary vehicle available to USCENTCOM for enabling cooperation and building partner capacity within the GCC against the Iranian threat remains the Commander's Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) Plan. While specific obstacles remain outside the realm of USCENTCOM control, there are subtle actions the Commander can take re-synchronize TSC activities and goals vis-à-vis the six member-states of the GCC to enable defense capabilities against an advancing Iranian threat. Using the lens of the developing Iranian threat, this paper identifies critical GCC political and military obstacles to conventional capability development at the individual member-state and joint GCC level. Additionally, this analysis reveals enablers and inhibitors resident within current USCENTCOM TSC activities. Finally, this paper advances short- and long-term recommendations for enabling tangible GCC military capability improvement and future collective security structure development.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS USCENTCOM, Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC, Iran, Theater Security Cooperation, TSC					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES  25	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Department
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-3414

**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.**

**Mirage or Reality: Enabling Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Collective Defense**

**by**

**Andrew T. Steele**

**Lieutenant Commander, U. S. Navy**

**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

**Signature: \_\_\_\_\_**

**04 May 2011**

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## **Abstract**

### *Mirage or Reality: Enabling Gulf Cooperation Council Collective Defense*

The wicked problem of current Iranian activities represents the most significant nation-level threat to security in the Arabian Gulf region and continues to be of mutual interest to the U.S. and the six member-states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The primary vehicle available to USCENTCOM for enabling cooperation and to building partner capacity within the GCC against the Iranian threat remains the Commander's Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) Plan. While specific obstacles remain outside the realm of USCENTCOM control, there are subtle actions the Commander can take re-synchronize TSC activities and goals vis-à-vis the six member-states of the GCC to enable defense capabilities against an advancing Iranian threat. Using the lens of the developing Iranian threat, this paper identifies critical GCC political and military obstacles to conventional capability development at the individual member-state and joint GCC level. Additionally, this analysis reveals enablers and inhibitors resident within current USCENTCOM TSC activities. Finally, this paper advances short- and long-term recommendations for enabling tangible GCC military capability improvement and future collective security structure development.

## **INTRODUCTION**

...American presidential administrations, led by both parties, going back some six decades, have regarded the stability of the Gulf Region as a vital national interest for the United States.

—Defense Secretary Robert Gates, *23 June 2009, Remarks to the U.S. CENTCOM Gulf States Chiefs of Defense Conference, Washington, D.C.*

The wicked problem of current Iranian activities represents the most significant long-term, nation-level threat to security in the Arabian Gulf region and continues to be of mutual interest to the U.S. and the six member-states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).<sup>1</sup> The primary vehicle available to Commander, USCENTCOM to enable cooperation and to build partner capacity within the GCC in order to address the Iranian threat is his Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) Plan, resident within the overall Theater Campaign Plan (TCP). While certain obstacles remain outside the realm of USCENTCOM control, there are subtle actions the Commander can take within the framework of his TSC plan to encourage progress. As such, to enable defense capabilities against an advancing Iranian threat, USCENTCOM should re-synchronize TSC activities and goals vis-à-vis the six member-states of the GCC.

The idea of multilaterally confronting external threats within the Arabian Gulf region under the GCC banner to support both regional and U.S. interests is not a new concept. Since the GCC's inception in 1981, several attempts have been made by its member-states to establish a collective defense force capable of deterring external threats. However, a viable force never materialized due to several obstacles and despite the combined efforts of the GCC and the U.S., particularly USCENTCOM. The nearly 31-year U.S. partnership with the member-states of the GCC represents the most visible example of USCENTCOM execution

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<sup>1</sup> Commander, U.S. Central Command. General James Mattis, Report to Congress: Before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Posture of U.S. Central Command, (01 March 2011). <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2011/03%20March/Mattis%2003-10-11.pdf>. (Accessed 01 April 2011), 27.

of assigned missions within multilateral and bilateral political and military frameworks alongside international and, more importantly, regional partners with shared mutual interests. Unfortunately, this partnership also represents the most visible example of lost opportunity and unmet potential when considering the goal of developing meaningful conventional military capability at the individual member-state or joint GCC level against an Iranian threat. USCENTCOM TSC activities involving GCC countries are bilateral in nature underlying the difficulty in achieving synchronization and collaboration across member-states of an intra-governmental organization.

Targeted U.S. support to specific member-state military functions will improve individual military capabilities as a force multiplier for a potential Iran contingency, in the short term, while potentially establishing the foundation for a future GCC collective defense capability in the long term.

The scope of this paper precludes a complete evaluation of GCC capacity to fully establish, man, train and equip a regional defense force capable of deterring an advancing Iranian threat without the support of an external security guarantor, namely the United States. Such an effort is a bridge too far in the near term and impractical, given the priority the U.S. places on the potential threat Iran poses to American and global interests. A more realistic goal is to consider what USCENTCOM can do in the short term to boost GCC member-state military capability to augment operations during a potential Iran contingency.

Therefore, using the lens of the developing Iranian threat, this paper will identify and evaluate internal GCC political and military obstacles to conventional capability development at the individual member-state and joint GCC level. Additionally, this analysis will reveal enablers and inhibitors resident in current USCENTCOM TSC activities that are

key drivers in both undermining and bolstering GCC ability to develop more capable military forces. Following a discussion of counterarguments, short- and long-term recommendations will be advanced for enabling tangible GCC military capability improvement and future collective security structure development.

## **IRAN – FRAMING THE THREAT**

Powerful Iran is the best friend of the neighboring states and the best guarantor of regional security.

— Islamic Republic of Iran President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad *August 2005, remarks to the Foreign Minister of Kuwait*

The Islamic Republic of Iran’s military strategy is rooted in three principles: deterrence of an attack on its territory, asymmetric response and attrition of enemy forces.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Iran’s military modernization and operations are focused on acquiring and developing asymmetric, unconventional and power projection capabilities designed to threaten its neighbors and defend against perceived U.S. military strengths. Iran accomplishes multiple force improvement initiatives across its regular and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) forces via foreign weapon system procurement programs and indigenous defense industries. However, Iranian endeavors specifically associated with anti-access naval operations, ballistic missile employment and the pursuit of a viable nuclear weapons program, as well as unconventional warfare efforts, represent the key concerns for GCC member-states and USCENTCOM when evaluating military capacity to confront Iran.

Since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, the Iranian regime has placed considerable emphasis on naval modernization in the context of denying access to the Arabian Gulf. Realizing its forces were no match conventionally to U.S. and western forces operating in the Gulf region, Iran’s procurement and doctrine development focused on leveraging multiple

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<sup>2</sup> Director, Defense Intelligence Agency. Lieutenant General Ronald Burgess, Report to Congress: *Before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Iran’s Military Power*, (14 April 2010). <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2010/04%20April/Burgess%2004-14-10.pdf> (Accessed 26 March 2011), 2.

threats and the Arabian Gulf region's constrained geography in a layered, "passive" defense strategy designed to survive the attacks of a superior conventional force and close the Strait of Hormuz to traffic.<sup>3</sup> Iranian reported acquisition and deployment of faster, more lethal and less observable naval attack craft and midget submarines from foreign and domestic sources, advanced coastal defense and anti-ship cruise missiles (CDCM/ASCM) from China, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance, and modern naval weaponry illustrate Iran's commitment to deterring attack and maintaining a viable response capability.<sup>4</sup>

Iran's ballistic missile development is also of major concern for the GCC and USCENTCOM. Iran currently fields the largest deployed ballistic missile force in the entire Middle East consisting of 2,200 ballistic missiles and long-range rockets with approximately 225 fixed and mobile launchers.<sup>5</sup> Beyond the sheer number of missiles and launchers, Iran has also upgraded range, accuracy and survivability through design and technological advances and adoption of anti-missile defense tactics.<sup>6</sup> Tehran's current missile inventory provides the regime with the potential capability to strike U.S. forces and GCC partner nations anywhere in the Arabian Gulf with minimal warning time.

Nested with Iran's ballistic missile development is the veritable 800-pound gorilla in the room: the Islamic Republic's pursuit of a nuclear weapons program. While publicly reaffirming to the international community that Iran's nuclear program is for peaceful

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<sup>3</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, "The Gulf States – Iran Navy", IHS Jane's: Defence & Security Intelligence & Analysis, [http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/irans130.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=IRGCN&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=GULFS&](http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/irans130.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=IRGCN&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=GULFS&) (accessed 08 April 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Mattis, *Posture Statement*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Burgess, *Iran's Military Power*, 13.



purposes, a 2010 International Atomic Energy Agency report<sup>7</sup> suggests that Iran has enriched enough uranium for two nuclear weapons. Additionally, the regime has reportedly gone to great lengths to protect the physical infrastructure of its nuclear research program through hardening, relocating to underground bunkers and purchasing and deploying advanced air defense systems. Iran's desire to field a viable nuclear weapon capability elicits very real USCENTCOM and GCC concerns over potential proliferation to non-state actors and provoking a Middle Eastern arms race.<sup>8</sup>

The IRGC-Qods "Jerusalem" Force (IRGC-QF) and the regime's support of proxies abroad are other factors of concern for USCENTCOM and its GCC partners. The IRGC-QF's role is to conduct clandestine operations abroad in support of the regime's foreign policy goals regardless of ideology<sup>9</sup>, including intelligence collection; providing support to surrogate proxies, pro- and anti-Iranian groups and terrorists; facilitating covert diplomacy, humanitarian and economic support; and procuring WMD-related technologies.<sup>10</sup> The IRGC-QF's work is designed to exert Iranian influence abroad and, more importantly, provide a possible range of responses for the regime amidst various contingencies. Since the founding of the GCC in 1981, Iran has a long history of being behind several terrorist acts and destabilizing activities throughout the Gulf region – specifically in Bahrain, Kuwait<sup>11</sup>, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

The advancing Iranian threat from the perspective of asymmetric doctrine and capabilities, ballistic missile and nuclear development and employment of unconventional

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Katzman. *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*. (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 04 March 2011), 24.

<sup>8</sup> Mattis, *Posture Statement*, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Katzman, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, 23.

<sup>11</sup> R.K. Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Record and Analysis*. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1988), 34-37.

<sup>12</sup> Burgess, *Iran's Military Power*, 9-10.

forces to exert Tehran's influence across the diplomatic, informational, military and economic spheres provides the prism in which to evaluate GCC obstacles preventing meaningful security cooperation and military capability development.

### **GCC – GETTING IN THE WAY OF ITSELF**

...The problem, quite frankly, is not the Iranian threat to the GCC or the U.S. or British or French role in the Gulf. The primary threat the Gulf Cooperation Council faces is the Gulf Cooperation Council.

—Anthony Cordesman, 30 October 2008, Washington D.C.

As a counterbalance to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the September 1980 onset of the Iran-Iraq War, the Arabian Gulf monarchies of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE officially formed the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf on 25 May 1981. While such cooperation gestated throughout the 1970s, Arab Gulf government concern over the perceived threats to security emanating from the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the expansion of the Iran-Iraq War became the catalyst in formally establishing mechanisms for “co-operation in all fields to achieve unity.”<sup>13</sup> Despite these roots of cooperation grounded in security issues, “all fields” did not include defense or collective security – neither term is found in the original GCC charter, nor were any mechanisms established within the council to address security – as a result of disagreement, an interest in not provoking direct Iranian or Iraqi action against the GCC and the primacy of national interests.<sup>14</sup> While significant cooperation occurred across the diplomatic, economic and cultural spectrums throughout the GCC's three-decade existence, collective political and individual military obstacles hampered progress towards developing significant individual deterrent capacity and a functional multilateral defense framework.

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<sup>13</sup>The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf. Charter <http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/> (Accessed 14 March 2011), 2.

<sup>14</sup>R.K. Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Record and Analysis*. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1988), 10, 35, 60.

## POLITICAL OBSTACLES

The key political obstacle towards building significant individual GCC military capability to confront Iran remains the lack of follow-through on the part of the GCC to enable tangible, cohesive approaches to defense policy and military strategy. Due to divergent individual member-state threat perceptions, national interests, perspectives on national sovereignty and overall disagreements (e.g., member-state concerns over Saudi hegemonic ambitions; border disputes between Bahrain-Qatar; tensions between Saudi Arabia-Qatar) the ability of the GCC to multilaterally agree upon a meaningful defense strategy (i.e., defining the threats, establishing a multilateral defense pact and assigning specific actions to specific tripwire events) has been challenging, elusive and piecemeal.<sup>15</sup> Externally driven events such as the Iran-Iraq War, the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the global war on terrorism, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Iran's destabilizing activities drove several GCC decisions, including the establishment of a Joint Defense Force under the Peninsula Shield moniker, aimed at facilitating the development of military capacity and mutual security.<sup>16</sup>

While the members of the GCC consistently recognize the importance of collectively integrating development of individual defensive capabilities to facilitate joint functionality, member-state pursuit of national interests conspired against viable military capability development to confront an Iranian threat.<sup>17</sup> Indicative of these constraints, GCC member-states pursued national defense and military capability development individually, vice

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<sup>15</sup> Christian Koch, "The GCC as a Regional Security Organization," KAS International Reports (November 2010) [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_21076-544-2-30.pdf?101110141517](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_21076-544-2-30.pdf?101110141517), (Accessed 30 March 2011), 26-29.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 25-28.

<sup>17</sup> HRH Prince Saud Al Faisal, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Saudi Arabia, "Towards a New Framework for Regional Security". *Manama Dialogue*. (05 December 2009), <http://www.saudiembassy.net/archive/2004/speeches/page1.aspx> (Accessed 07 April 2011), 2.

collectively, through cultivating closer defense and security partnerships with the U.S. than with each other.<sup>18</sup> These partnerships serve as key political obstacles to individual military capacity development. As a result, under the perceived security umbrella provided by the U.S., individual GCC nations pursue military procurement, training and basing agreements designed to improve national strength often at the expense of regional GCC capability.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, since 1981, GCC member-states fell into two camps regarding perceived external threats – Iran and Iraq. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were primarily concerned with Iraq, while Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and the UAE focused on Iran.<sup>20</sup> With the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iran effectively became the common nation-level threat to the GCC. While there are aspects of foreign policy towards Iran where the GCC members speak with one voice – the support of a nuclear-free Iran and Arabian Gulf and opposition to Iranian meddling in the internal GCC member-state politics – each GCC country executes its own foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran based on individual threat perceptions and national interest.<sup>21</sup> This lack of cohesion in the foreign policy arena towards Iran further complicates defense capacity development at the GCC and individual state level.

## MILITARY OBSTACLES

At the individual member-state level, a GCC country-by-country analysis reveals specific force and mission characteristics that persist as obstacles to building effective military capability to confront the common threat of Iran. Shared characteristics include lack of interoperability; poor command, control and communications; ineffective military

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<sup>18</sup> Anthony Cordesman and Aram Nerguizian, *The Gulf Military Balance in 2010: An Overview*. 22 April 2010, [http://csis.org/files/publication/100422\\_GulfMilBal.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/100422_GulfMilBal.pdf) (accessed 19 MAR 10), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 10-13.

<sup>20</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *The Military Balance in the Middle East*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004) 312.

<sup>21</sup> The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf. Closing Statement of 31<sup>st</sup> GCC Summit in Abu Dhabi, 08 December 2010, [http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2010/December/theuae\\_December195.xml&section=theuae&col=](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2010/December/theuae_December195.xml&section=theuae&col=) (Accessed 07 April 2011).

leadership; high turnover due to compulsory service; a failure to leverage advanced platforms and weapons systems into combat capability; and a lack of clear mission direction for the armed forces provided by the political leadership.<sup>22</sup>

Primary among these characteristics is the bifurcated force development within each GCC member-state. The authoritarian monarchies of each GCC state established force structures designed to meet two overall missions – the defense of the state against external threats and preservation of the regime against internal opponents. The mission of regime protection takes the primary role in each of these force structures resulting in higher priority funding and more capable assets focused internally vice externally. As a result, these dual force structures and focus on preserving internal control often compromise overall conventional military capability.<sup>23</sup> Given the events of the last five months in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and Syria and the continuing struggle against Islamic extremism within individual GCC member-state borders, this internal focus will continue to receive the bulk of attention in force development and planning.

This country-by-country analysis also reveals a lack of a concerted effort by GCC member-states to field conventional forces supported by interoperability, training, sustainment and combat effectiveness. As previously discussed, current GCC member military force shortfalls can be tied to the dependence on the U.S. to deter or defeat an external threat and not on cohesive defense goals or priorities set forth by the GCC collective. Therefore, individual GCC member-state procurement is based on national self-interest, often emphasizing the “purchase of modern major weapons systems that were

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<sup>22</sup> Cordesman and Nerguizian, *The Gulf Military Balance in 2010: An Overview*, 2-8.

<sup>23</sup> Risa Brooks, “Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East” in *The Future Security Environment in the Middle East: Conflict, Stability and Political Change*, ed. Nora Bensahel, Daniel L. Byman. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, 2004), 129-130.

perceived to provide a prestige in terms of regional status” without equal emphasis placed on the ability to work jointly within its own borders, within a coalition or collectively with GCC member-state militaries.<sup>24</sup> This emphasis on investing in modern air, air defense, naval and ground force platforms and weapons was not matched by similar developments in force planning, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability, command, control and communications infrastructure, or required training and maintenance contracts designed to sustain and operate new systems effectively or modernize existing inventories. As a result, GCC member-states, who spent a combined 72USD billion on U.S. weapons and platforms between 1981 and 2006, failed to transform “forces whose effectiveness is proportionate to their total cost” into distinct quantitative and arguably qualitative capability advantages.<sup>25</sup>

These prominent obstacles within the GCC highlight the difficult environment USCENTCOM must navigate in its task of executing TSC activities and building GCC member-state partner capacity to support operations during a potential Iran contingency.

### **U.S. THEATER SECURITY COOPERATION**

We sell stuff to build relationships.

—Vice Admiral Jeffrey Wieringa, Director, Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), 17 June 2009, remarks to Reuters while attending the Paris Air Show

To evaluate current USCENTCOM TSC activities with GCC member-states, a short primer on overall U.S. TSC doctrine and execution is offered. This primer will define the purpose of TSC, the guidance that informs combatant commander TSC planning, and provide examples of TSC focus areas and activities.

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<sup>24</sup> Christopher Blanchard, Richard Grimmett. *The Gulf Security Dialogue and Related Arms Proposals*. (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 08 October 2008), 1; and Cordesman and Nerguizian, *The Gulf Military Balance in 2010: An Overview*. 22 April 2010, [http://csis.org/files/publication/100422\\_GulfMilBal.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/100422_GulfMilBal.pdf) (accessed 19 MAR 10), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, *Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Warfare: Volume One*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007) 10-11, 13.

## TSC DOCTRINE – A PRIMER

TSC, specifically defined as “a focused program of bilateral and multilateral defense activities conducted with foreign countries to serve mutual security interests and build defense partnerships,” connects theater activities with foreign partners to U.S. national security objectives and, as a result, intends to “build the right defense partnerships for the future.”<sup>26</sup> TSC plans do not stand alone; these plans are integrated within the commander’s overall Theater Campaign Plan (TCP) and are “inherently joint, interagency, multinational and complementary to the Department of State.”<sup>27</sup>

While each combatant commander is responsible for developing and executing their respective TSC plans, planning does not occur without specific or concrete guidance. The *Guidance for Employment of the Force* (GEF) and the *Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan* (JSCP) 2008-2010 represent the primary sources for translating strategic Presidential and Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) guidance into TSC activities within a particular combatant command’s area of responsibility (AOR). The GEF identifies prioritized desired end states, planning requirements and assumptions and specifically states TSC planners will “address partner readiness, sustainment and training, as well as ways to build transparent, accountable and ethical defense and security planning and execution; efficient resource management and business processes; and methods to identify and reduce corruption.”<sup>28</sup>

Once the TSC plan is validated and approved by the SECDEF, finite resources are applied towards specific TSC activities designed to meet the combatant commander’s

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<sup>26</sup> Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operation Planning*, final coordination, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0 (Washington, DC: CJCS, 26 December 2006), I-3; and Clarence J. Bouchat, *An Introduction to Theater Strategy and Regional Security*. August 2007, Strategic Studies Institute. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display> (Accessed 23 February 2011), 109.

<sup>27</sup> Bouchat, *An Introduction to Theater Strategy and Regional Security*, 109.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Guidance for Employment of the Force 2008-2010* (U), (Washington D.C. Pentagon, May 2008). (Secret) Information extracted is unclassified, 39.

objectives. TSC activities include conducting multinational exercises and training, providing security assistance through Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and International Military Education and Training (IMET) and military-to-military contacts and exchanges. Of note, while U.S. TSC planning is doctrinally multilateral, TSC plan execution occurs bilaterally with partner nations. This poses synchronization challenges when dealing with member-states of a collective organization like the GCC. As TSC is executed, CJCS and the theater commander will provide regular assessments of TSC activities to assess effects and progress.<sup>29</sup>

#### CURRENT USCENTCOM TSC

Current USCENTCOM TSC activities with partner nations are grounded in “cooperation based on shared interests” and fall within four focus areas – training, exchanges, equipping and exercises.<sup>30</sup> While the intent behind USCENTCOM commander TSC activities is to achieve multilateral effects across several priorities within his AOR, effective GCC individual member partner capacity to serve as a force multiplier in confronting Iran remains consistently out of reach. Specific individual security cooperation initiatives, overall USCENTCOM priorities, exercise activity and theater-strategic dialogue, reveal critical inhibitors and enablers to building effective individual military capability.

#### INHIBITORS

The key inhibitor to building individual partner conventional military capability as a force multiplier and as a foundation for a potential future GCC defense force continues to be the bilateral nature in which USCENTCOM executes TSC with each GCC member-state.

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<sup>29</sup> Patrick C. Sweeny, *A Primer for: Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF), Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP), the Adaptive Planning and Execution (APEX) System, and Global Force Management (GFM)*, NWC 6031A (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2009), 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> Mattis, *Posture Statement*, 34-36.



More specifically, individual USCENTCOM military-to-military exchanges, FMS and defense pacts executed with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are driven primarily by serving U.S. and partner national interests at the expense of what may best build conventional individual military capability and interoperability to collectively deter and confront an Iranian threat. As a result, U.S. FMS to GCC partner nations has focused on providing high quality modern aircraft, air and missile defense and weapons systems based on GCC member-state priorities and threat perceptions vice a concerted effort to synchronize these sales and exchanges across the GCC to leverage potential existing capabilities and develop real individual combat capacity.<sup>31</sup> A snapshot of U.S. FMS initiatives between 2000 and 2008 to GCC member-states reveals disparate and uncoordinated arms sales emphasizing ground and internal security forces rather than redundant missile defense, interoperable air defense systems or command and control across the entire GCC.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, USCENTCOM ends up perpetuating vice mitigating the effects GCC obstacles already have on the ability of member-states to improve individual military capacity at the conventional level by executing TSC FMS programs to facilitate progress in other priority areas. While USCENTCOM may establish progress in other priority areas as a result of these relationships (i.e., enhanced intelligence –sharing, improved capability to counter violent extremist organizations, cooperation with transition in Iraq and combat operations in Afghanistan), GCC member-states emerge with a “hollow” force that, on paper, provides a qualitative advantage against Iran when in reality, limited progress is made

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<sup>31</sup> Blanchard and Grimmett, *The Gulf Security Dialogue and Related Arms Proposals*, 15-22; and Kenneth Katzman, *The Persian Gulf States: Issues For U.S. Policy*, 2006 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 21 August 2006), 14-16.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

towards establishing a viable military capability at the individual or the GCC level.

## ENABLERS

Current USCENTCOM TSC activities also reveal potential enablers for building partner capacity and improving individual GCC member-state military capabilities as a force multiplier against an Iranian threat.

USCENTCOM participation in the Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD) serves as a key enabler for building partner capacity and individual military capability development as a potential force multiplier to support an Iran contingency. The GSD, launched in May 2006, serves as the “principal security coordination mechanism between the United States and the six countries of the GCC” with several core objectives including the “improvement of GCC defense capabilities and interoperability.”<sup>33</sup> The GSD forum facilitated a concerted effort to better align FMS of defense systems to improve GCC member maritime, air and missile defense capabilities as well as military-to-military training with stated goal of improving interoperability. As of 2009, GCC member-states are procuring Shared Early Warning, which facilitates the near real-time sharing of air and missile track data to provide maximum warning time for partner nations to defend their borders.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, USCENTCOM facilitated “mission-specific training for our allies and partners” by establishing the Gulf Air Warfare Center and Integrated Air and Missile Defense Center in the UAE and plans future Centers of Excellence in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to address maritime and command, control and communication issues.<sup>35</sup> Multi-national exercises involving the U.S. and GCC partner nations also serve as key enablers. The EAGLE RESOLVE series of exercises are

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<sup>33</sup> Katzman, *The Gulf Security Dialogue and Related Arms Sale Proposals*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Secretary Robert Gates, “Remarks”, *USCENTCOM Gulf States Chiefs of Defense Conference*, (Washington, DC: 23 June 2009). <http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1362> (Accessed 07 April 2011)

<sup>35</sup> Mattis, *Posture Statement*, 34.

designed “to enhance regional cooperative defense efforts of the GCC and the U.S.”<sup>36</sup>

It is important to note that the preceding enablers would be nonexistent without the critical efforts of the USCENTCOM Commander. TSC planning and execution is inherent in his job description and as such, he is the de facto arbiter of its success or failure. As a “soldier and diplomat”, USCENTCOM commander responsibilities bridge the gap between military operations and diplomacy.<sup>37</sup> General David Petraeus’ efforts to successfully align “bilateral initiatives for multilateral effects – multi-bilateralism” to enable critical individual GCC military capabilities during his time as USCENTCOM commander represents a key example to follow.<sup>38</sup>

## **COUNTERARGUMENTS**

Despite any logic in the arguments set forth in this paper, one cannot ignore the existence of two valid counterarguments deserving of further exploration. First, USCENTCOM TSC is right where it needs to be given the constraints of limited formal intra-GCC defense cooperation, a GCC reliance on the U.S. as a security guarantor, GCC focus on internal security, lack of interoperable forces and no cohesive Iranian foreign policy to execute. Current TSC initiatives of FMS, IMET, multinational training and exercises and participation in the GSD are more than adequate to make progress in building partner capacity at the political and military level in order to accomplish theater and national strategic objectives.

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<sup>36</sup> Cordesman and Nerguizian, *The Gulf Military Balance in 2010: An Overview*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> John M. Myers “Singular Vision: A Plan to Enable CentCom and State to Work Together”. *Armed Forces Journal*. (March 2008), <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2008/03/3463975> (Accessed 8 March 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Commander, U.S. Central Command, General David Petraeus, “Regional Security Architecture”, *The 6<sup>th</sup> IISS Regional Security Summit Manama Dialogue*. (12 December 2009), <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-iiss-regional-security-summit/manama-dialogue-2009/plenary-sessions-and-speeches-2009/fifth-plenary-session/fifth-plenary-session-general-david-petraeus/> (Accessed 07 April 2011)

Additionally, given the importance the U.S. puts on countering the destabilizing activities of Iran and the maintenance of security in the Arabian Gulf region, the necessity for tangible military capability from GCC partner nations will not be a necessary critical factor for USCENTCOM planners in an Iran contingency. In fact, conventional military capability within the GCC is a “nice to have” vice a “need to have” as the true nature of USCENTCOM TSC activities is to leverage member-states towards accomplishing higher priority tasks such as enabling transition in Iraq, supporting the mission in Afghanistan or disrupting violent extremist networks.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper focused on the primary vehicle available to USCENTCOM to enable building partner capacity and individual military capability within the member-states of the GCC to deter and confront a potentially belligerent Iran – the commander’s TSC plan nested within the overall TCP. This issue deserves attention, as Iran remains the most significant long-term, nation-level threat to Arabian Gulf security. While certain obstacles to effective military development within the GCC remain outside the USCENTCOM realm of direct control, subtle re-synchronization within the framework of TSC activities is necessary to encourage progress in the short term.

Through the lens of the Iranian threat, particularly Iranian anti-access operations, ballistic missile employment and the pursuit of a viable nuclear weapons program as well as unconventional IRGC-QF operations abroad, this paper evaluated GCC obstacles to conventional capability development. Specific obstacles included a lack of cohesive defense policy, a reliance on the U.S. as a security guarantor, divergent threat perceptions, bifurcated

force structures aligned to regime protection and external defense as well as a deficiency in interoperability.

Using the identified GCC political and military-to-military environment that USCENTCOM must navigate to accomplish the task of building partner capacity, the paper discussed overall TSC doctrine and evaluated USCENTCOM TSC plan enablers and inhibitors to GCC military capability development. Specific inhibitors identified the inherent pitfalls of bilateral execution of TSC activities as well as the effect prioritization of tasks has on conventional military capacity building. This examination also revealed the GSD and specific multilateral initiatives involving FMS and training as key enablers toward building capacity to confront an Iranian threat. Targeted U.S. support to specific member-state military functions will improve individual military capability, in the short term, as a force multiplier for a potential Iran contingency, while potentially establishing the foundation for a future GCC collective defense capability, in the long term.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **SHORT TERM**

**Align U.S. FMS across the entire GCC.** To encourage interoperability and overall capability with particular emphasis on countering the potential Iranian threat, USCENTCOM should identify and validate common shortfalls among GCC partners and offer identical FMS solutions across the GCC. The goal would be to refocus FMS away from the acquisition of disparate advanced platforms toward critical capabilities of command and control, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities and interoperable communications to enable sources of combat power.

**Identify GCC Military Strengths and Capabilities for Targeted TSC.** While overall GCC military capability remains weak, there are capable sectors of GCC member-state militaries (i.e., the Royal Navy of Oman/Royal Omani Police Coast Guard, capable intelligence services, UAE Air Forces and Kuwaiti, Saudi Arabian and UAE missile defense)<sup>39</sup> that USCENTCOM can target more robust TSC support to enable a potential foundation in which to build a future GCC deterrent force.

### LONG TERM

**Encourage GCC-originated initiatives to create multilateral structures.** While outside the commander's direct control, USCENTCOM should support any GCC steps to formally establish Defense and Foreign Policy institutions. A potential Gulf Confederation similar to the European Union and a reestablished GCC Defense Force under the Peninsula Shield model with a unified command structure are viable vehicles for USCENTCOM to invest time, money and training to facilitate future capacity development.<sup>40</sup> While not a perfect example, USCENTCOM can investigate U.S. Africa Command's role in supporting the creation of the African Union (AU)'s Africa Standby Force (ASF). Keen insights can be gleaned from the careful, deliberate process the AU and the ASF followed for establishing regionalized force capable of affecting very specific scenarios.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Anthony Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, *Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Warfare: Volume One*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> Mohammad Al Asoomi, "In Theory: Building a Case For Gulf Confederation," Gulf News, 31 March 2011, <http://gulfnews.com/business/opinion/in-theory-building-a-case-for-gulf-confederation-1.785259> (Accessed 26 April 2011); and "Gulf States Meet on Manpower for Revived Peninsula Shield," Geostrategy-Direct, 12 July 2010 [http://www.geostrategy-direct.com/geostrategy-direct/secure/2010/7\\_14/3.asp](http://www.geostrategy-direct.com/geostrategy-direct/secure/2010/7_14/3.asp) (Accessed 21 February 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Kova, "The ASF and AFRICOM: Partnering for Peace in Africa", U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, [http://pksoi.army.mil/PKM/publications/relatedpubs/documents/Kolva\\_ASF\\_article.pdf](http://pksoi.army.mil/PKM/publications/relatedpubs/documents/Kolva_ASF_article.pdf) (accessed 28 February 2011).

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